

3/2/10

To: Education Programming Committee
cc: Remainder of RSU 24 Board
Administrative Team

From: Bill Webster

Subject: Recommendation on Small School Administration

Summary Recommendation

RSU 24 schools with enrollment of +/- 100 students should have a full-time teaching principal with responsibilities split roughly 50-50 between teaching and administration. An experienced supervising principal should oversee a new teaching principal for the first year.

Overview

On December 15, 2009 the Board approved a number of adjustments to meet to budget curtailment and approved the appointment of Mike Hammer to Supervising Principal over Hancock and Lamoine working with Val Perkins, who will retire at the end of the school year. The appointment also included the charge that I would make a recommendation to the Board by March on future administrative configuration to operate the school going forward. This charge was quickly expanded to cover all our small schools with +/- 100 enrolled students. Schools in this category include Beech Hill (if we operate the school next year), Cave Hill, Ella Lewis and Lamoine.

The issue of small school administration is a hot button for many as was evidenced in the discussions and public comments leading up to the December 15th vote. Since then, I have had the benefit of input from community meetings at Cave Hill and Lamoine Consolidated, readings of available research, information from some other Maine districts and discussion with some of my superintendent colleagues.

While there is evidence that a shared principal can be very effective, there remains much interest in each school having a principal that they could call their own.

Student/Administrator Ratios

Our small schools began the 2009-10 school year with the following administration make-up:

School	Enrollment (10/1 count)	Administration Make-up
Beech Hill School	96	Full-time principal
Cave Hill School	80	Full-time interim* (after years of a .6 principal).
Ella Lewis	98	Teaching Principal (.67 administration)
Lamoine	118	.6 Interim Principal**

*Reports to supervising principal at another school, who serves as back-up and mentor.

**Working with supervising principal since January 1st in anticipation of June retirement.

Overall, RSU 24 excluding Beech Hill has approximately 200 students for every administrator based upon 2,700 students and 13.5 administrators. RSU 24 with Beech Hill has a ratio of 193 students for every administrator. The EPS guideline is one administrator for approximately

every 310 students. The Education Programming Committee discussed, without resolution, the possibility of increasing the ratio to around 250 students for every administrator. My recommendation, if adopted, would improve the overall ratio to approximately 210 to 1.

Options

Other small schools (150 students or less) in Hancock and Washington counties identify the realistic possibilities for small school administration. They include the following:

School	Approximate Enrollment	Administration Make-up
SAD 37 School 1	147	Half-time principal who is also curriculum director
SAD 37 School 2	90	Half-time principal who also coordinates Title 1
SAD 37 School 3	150	Shared principal with another school
SAD 37 School 4	120	Shared principal with another school
4 Union 93 Schools	60-88	Teaching principal (roughly 50/50)
4 Union 134 Schools	50-60	Full-time teachers with a principal stipend

Schools with 60 students are led by a full-time teacher, who also receives a stipend. All other schools between 60 and 150 students have 50% administration with the remaining 50% of a full-time position being made up in one of three ways: (1) combining with central office responsibilities; (2) being principal of a second school; or (3) being a teacher.

SAD 37 has approximately 800 students. In talking with my colleagues at last week's superintendent's meeting, I was unable to find any district with over 1,000 students that combined a principal position with central office responsibilities. Katrina Kane had such a position in Ellsworth when she was HCTC director and curriculum coordinator. She told me that too often she was drawn away from her building, and the district-wide responsibilities were frequently in direct conflict with her building administration responsibilities. I was not able to find any examples in education research that supported this type of configuration.

SAD 37 does have one principal who covers two schools with 270 students in total. This situation mirrors a concept called "twinning" in Ontario where over 200 schools in the province have been paired under one principal. One research article identified many favorable educational aspects of twinning including improved sharing of resources across schools, greater teacher collaboration and reduced cost. A significant detriment was the common perception by one of the paired communities that they had lost their own principal and some of their local identity.

Teaching principals are common in Maine, particularly in districts with only one elementary school and enrollment between 60 and 150 students. Communities tend to favor this type of administration over a shared principal. Negatives are two fold: (1) students being shortchanged because of interruptions; and (2) the blurring of the conflicting roles, supervisory and peer, with other teachers.

While I initially favored a shared principal because of the educational benefits, community input and the reading of the community section of our draft vision statement strongly points to the desirability of a teaching principal in our smaller schools. I do strongly support having an experienced supervising principal for the first year over a teaching principal, because of my limited time to work with new principals. Such an organizational format would make the teaching principal a stronger administrator going forward.